

Guatemalan Auxiliary Markings, 1898-1967

ROPEX 2015 – Synopsis

This exhibit has been displayed in three prior WSP shows. It began as a three-frame exhibit. Its most recent iteration was as a five-frame exhibit. It has now been expanded to seven frames. Most of the newly added materials comprise auxiliary markings applied specifically to air mail, parcels, official mail, and registered mail. The order of the exhibit also has been revised. The five-frame version of this exhibit is available on line: click on the fifth item down on the ISGC home page: www.guatemalastamps.com

A. Scope

Most postal markings are applied either to prevent the reuse of postage stamps, to note the place and date of mailing, or to note the date and place of receipt of a mail item. This study looks instead at Guatemala's auxiliary markings. These are grouped into three broad categories:

- (a) **Accountability Markings:** Various markings were applied to enable postal officials to ascribe or disclaim liability for letters as they traveled through the mail system. Special markings were applied from time to time to mail originating in specific collection boxes, and carried by specific letter carriers. Other markings were applied to explain the causes of failings and shortcomings in the course of transit, such as letters which were damaged, soiled, misdirected, or undeliverable.
- (b) **Directional Markings:** A second broad group of postal markings were applied to show the routing a letter was intended to follow to its destination, or the service it was to receive en route. Class of service markings are treated as a sub-set of directional markings. Included are markings unique to air transport (whether for a part way of the letter's journey, or through to a letter's ultimate destination), special delivery and express services, after hours processing at the originating post office, foreign and domestic parcels, and official mail.
- (c) **Promotional Markings:** Guatemalan postal authorities applied many promotional marks in this period, at the behest of both public agencies and private organizations. A great variety of markings fall within this little studied group of postal markings. Uniquely perhaps, Guatemalan philately traditionally treats promotional markings as auxiliary postal markings. The reason and the justification for this is explained, and also documented, within the frames of this exhibit.

B. Period Studied

The period of this study begins in Guatemala's period of liberal rule starting with the lengthy presidency of José Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920).¹ This period saw exponential growth in foreign investment, which, in turn, led to rapid growth in infrastructure and trade – and in Guatemala's

¹*Liberal* is used in the sense of 19th century classical liberalism, as espoused by such political economists as John Locke, David Ricardo, and Adam Smith.

postal system. The period includes the unique Ten Years of Spring (1944-54), a unique era of agrarian reform and democratic change. The study concludes with the introduction in January 1967, six years into Guatemala's 36-year-long civil war, of "white terror": unrestricted terrorism by the Guatemalan Army against civilian. This in turn brought a disintegration of infrastructure – including a disintegration of public services in general, and of the Guatemalan postal system in particular.

C. Thesis of This Exhibit and Items of Note

Many Guatemalan auxiliary markings remain entirely undocumented in the philatelic literature. I hope through this exhibit to convey a sense of the range of items which we in the Guatemalan philatelic community are yet to catalogue and study. Accordingly, marks which are not recorded in the literature are marked with a diamond ♦. Covers displaying marks which pre- or post-date their previously assumed period of use are marked with a stylized hourglass X. The exhibit also strives (to the extent the materials allow) to show how Guatemala's social, political, and economic history is reflected in the country's auxiliary postal markings. As postally-applied promotional markings traditionally are classified as auxiliary markings in Guatemalan philately,² and specifically to further that objective, such markings comprise a major division of the exhibit.

Many of Guatemala's auxiliary markings have not been studied extensively. For instance, the only reference in the literature of Guatemalan philately to its promotional markings well may be the following 60 words, referring to a marking promoting a lottery on behalf of an orphanage:

[Guatemala City philatelist Romeo Routhier] tells me that the slogan hand stamped across the second illustrated cover was added at the postoffice [sic] at the request of the Casa[s] del Niño which is an orphanage. The slogan gave free publicity and helped the sale of lottery tickets. The interested party furnishes the rubber stamp, and even today this custom goes on.³

D. Difficulties and Challenges

Three significant constraints affected the acquisition of material for this exhibit:

1. First, while most of the items displayed in this exhibit were not especially costly to acquire, nearly all of them are decidedly uncommon in the philatelic marketplace. Only three dealers have any significant stock of Guatemalan postal history (one dealer in Argentina and two in England). I first began collecting Guatemalan postal history in 2011. I began to investigate the country's auxiliary markings in earnest two years later. Acquisition of the items in this exhibit has required searches several times weekly through Ebay, Delcampe, and Bidstart, as well purchases from dealers and auction houses on five continents.

²Gruson, *Postal Markings of Guatemala*, chapter 37, "Promotional Hand-Stamps, *Marcas Promocionales*".

³Keith Dixon, "Examples of Philatelic Cooperation," *El Quetzal*, vol. 32, № 232, pp. 3, 30 (1981). A cover with a better, more complete impression of the same 1939 *Casas del Niño* mark is shown in frame 16, page 1.

2. Guatemala is a small country. Its stock of philatelic materials is disproportionately small, even for a country of its size. The bulk of the materials displayed are from three middle decades of the twentieth century: the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. Guatemala's official population and official literacy rate are set out in the following table – along with a population number discounted by half, to exclude the vast numbers counted as minimally literate by the government, but who were too poor to use the mails. (By scholarly consensus, these official numbers were significantly overstated.)

	1930 census	1950 census
official population count	1,771,000	2,790,700
official literacy rate	19%	29%
literate population	342,000	812,000
Estimate of the literate population with economic means to use the mails (half of the preceding value)	± 170,000	± 400,000

3. As noted in Division C of this Synopsis, the significance of most types of auxiliary markings applied in Guatemala in the first half of the twentieth century eluded philatelists of that era. Therefore most of the surviving examples are on covers which were not carefully preserved. Additionally, these auxiliary markings normally were applied by harried postal clerks, often with worn rubber stamps, and taking little care to create clear impressions. The condition of the material displayed is as good as possible, given these limitations.

E. Some Major References

Fine, "1920s Coffee Promotional Markings," *El Quetzal*, Mar. 2015 (forthcoming).

Frigstad, "Special Delivery Service," *El Quetzal*, vol. 22, № 185, p. 20 (1971).

Goodman, *Guatemala: A Handbook on the Postal History and Philately*, vol. 2 (1975).

Cheung, "Early Guatemalan Airmail Across the Oceans," Part 2, *El Quetzal*, vol. 63, № 354, p. 4 (2013).

Gruson, *The Postal Markings of Guatemala*, 2004 and supp. 2007 (referred to as 'PMG').

I have referred to numerous other articles from the 60-plus years of the International Society of Guatemalan Collectors' quarterly journal, *El Quetzal*.

Guatemala's postal system interacted with the events and with the commerce of the era. So far as possible, materials have been selected which reflect this fact. Also, to convey an understanding of the social, economic, and political context within which this postal history lies, reference has been made to the exhibitor's own library of academic treatises and articles about twentieth century Guatemala.